English Language Teaching Curriculum in Indonesia: Senior High School Teachers’ Perspectives and Practices

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Abstract: While much has been researched about the practice of newly revised national curriculum (2013 curriculum) in elementary schools, research examining teachers’ perspectives and practices of English Language Teaching (ELT) in the context of 2013 curriculum remains limited. This article explores the perspectives of principles and characteristics of 2013 curriculum of four Indonesian senior high school teachers of English and the implementation of the principles and characteristics in their lessons. Narrative reports were constructed for each teacher using semi-structured interviews. These reports illustrate each teachers’ perspectives as well as how they implement the principles and characteristics of the 2013 curriculum in ELT classroom. The result of this study shows that the teachers were challenged by time constraints provided in the 2013 curriculum where with the very limited time they should achieve a lot of learning indicators proposed by 2013 curriculum. Scientific approach and the three learning models (problem-based learning, project-based learning, and discovery learning) were not well implemented in ELT class. Teachers were lack of knowledge of implementing the learning approaches and models offered in the 2013 curriculum. This research has demonstrated that the teachers tend to perceive that to implement the principles and characteristics of the 2013 curriculum in ELT classroom, English teachers require extra endeavor.

1 INTRODUCTION

The emergence of 2013 English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum in Indonesia is a response to the reality that English learning in the previous curriculum failed to reach communicative goals set by the government (Tantra, 2015; Ahmad, 2014; Nur & Madkur, 2014; Wachidah, 2013). The goals, as stated in the former Regulation of Ministry of National Education Number 22 Year 2006, aimed at developing students’ communication competencies in oral and written forms to achieve certain levels of informational literacy, having an awareness of the nature and the importance of English to improve the nation’s competitiveness in a global society, and developing students’ understanding of the interrelationship between language and culture.

Although English is considered to have a strategic role in the modernization and globalization of Indonesian society, and has been practically taught for many years in schools in Indonesia, namely three years in junior high school and three years in senior high school, the outcome has not been satisfying. Only a few high school graduates are able to communicate intelligibly in English (Mappiasse & bin Sishes, 2014; Imperiani, 2012; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Lie 2007; Hadi, 2016). The failure had been portrayed in literature as textbook-directed, grammar-focused, and teacher-centered (Sahiruddin, 2013). Large class sizes, teachers with low English proficiency, lack of opportunity to actually practice speaking English in the classroom and socialize outside the classroom, and the dominant use of mother tongue also contribute to the problems of ELT in Indonesia (Dardjowidjodo, 2000; Nur & Madkur, 2014).

Some reasons for curriculum change in Indonesia from the 2006 curriculum to the 2013 curriculum are the anticipation and preparation for the modernization of learning in the 21st century (Tantra, 2015, p.2). As Oliva and Gordon (2013, p.150) point out that among the characteristics of the 21st century learning is to encourage students to have higher order thinking skills, active, collaborative, and student-centered learning where the teachers play a role as facilitator in learning, not the only source of knowledge. As mentioned in the regulation of the
minister of education and culture number 69 year 2013 on the basic framework of senior high school curriculum structure that the objective of the 2013 curriculum is to prepare Indonesian people to have the ability to live as individuals and citizens who believe in God, productive, creative, innovative, and able to contribute to the society, nation, and world civilization. This indicates that the 2013 curriculum has a global vision that should be embodied in the context of learning in schools, both inside and outside the classroom. Thus, the ability of teachers to translate the global vision of the 2013 curriculum in curricular, intra-curricular, and extra-curricular activities is a key determinant of success.

In education system, curriculum shift is inevitable (Nur & Madkur, 2014, p. 123). Changes are needed as an effort to face world future challenges. Teachers, as the key of curriculum implementers, are also required to change their perspective on existing innovations. Often, the newly revised curriculum results in discrepancy due to the process of receiving and perceiving (Bekalo and Welford, 2000). O’Sullivan (2002) added that the policy related to curriculum innovation contains complexities, challenges, and potential incongruent relationship with its practices.

This article aims to explore four senior high school English teachers’ perspectives of principles and characteristics of 2013 curriculum and how they practice those principles in ELT classroom. The study offers empirical evidence in form of narrative reports.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 ELT Curriculum in Indonesia

At the beginning of English Language Teaching curriculum implementation after the independence in 1945, grammar-translation method (Richards & Rodgers, 1990) became the only option in the context of English language learning in Indonesian schools. The method was considered suitable for large class sizes, inexpensive, and it required only grammatical knowledge of teachers (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Sumardi, 1993). Starting from early 1950s, the Indonesian government began to introduce an audio-lingual approach that was eventually adopted into the ELT curriculum. One main characteristic of this audio-lingual period was the massive use of language laboratory as the main support to language learning. As this project was part of the Ford Foundation of United States, everytime English teacher training was conducted there must be at least one native speaker to be the resource person. During this period, English became the main language in colleges and universities, and the use of audio-lingual approach was considered good to enhance students’ English skills (Sahiruddin, 2013; Mappiasse & bin Sishes, 2014). After several years of implementation, the audio-lingual based curriculum met challenges where the number of teachers who participated in curriculum training decreased. Compared to the need of English teachers across Indonesia, the number of teachers with good competency was very small (Dardjowidjojo 2000, p. 25). Another main issue remained during the implementation of audio-lingual based curriculum was large class sizes which led teachers to re-employ grammar-translation method.

In 1975, the revision of the English curriculum took place although the audio-lingual method was still in use with more structured and systematic approach. According to Tjokrosujoso and Fachurrazy (1997), this revised version employed guidelines that covered all components of the curriculum such as learning objectives, teaching materials, approaches, and evaluations. For the first time during this period, the government introduced compulsory English textbooks for junior and senior high school level. However, the structure-based audio-lingual curriculum remained unsuccessful due to the fact that the requirements to implement the audio-lingual approach were not fulfilled, such as the absence of language laboratory and native speakers as models (Jazadi, 2004; Wiramaya 1991, Sahiruddin, 2013). Consequently, the failure of 1975 English curriculum led the government to initiate a new curriculum which was named the 1984 communicative-based curriculum. This curriculum was claimed to enhance students’ communicative abilities. However, upon its implementation, the curriculum still emphasized on language form and structure (Jazadi, 2004). This could be seen from the content of English textbook designs for junior and senior high schools that were still dominated by language structure learning. Thus, the 1984 curriculum was deemed to fail to meet expectations for several reasons; first, teachers still used audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods; second, Indonesian language was used as a medium of classroom instruction; and, third, English vocabulary was taught using Indonesian translation (Jazadi, 2004). Similarly, Tjokrosujoso and Fachurrazy (1997) stated that the 1984 ELT curriculum was considered unsuccessful because it was inconsistent where the curriculum main’s
objective was on reading comprehension, its teaching programs were language structure-oriented, its teaching approach used communicative, and its evaluation was grammar-based.

The failure of the 1984 ELT curriculum became the reason behind the next revision of the ELT curriculum. After conducting a series of surveys on teachers and students, it was revealed that productive skills were more needed than receptive skills, and communicative approaches were more important than grammatical approaches. Thus, the government through the education department revised the 1984 curriculum with the 1994 curriculum which was called the meaning-based communicative approach. Jazadi (2000) argued that this approach was applied because during that period the communicative approach became the trend in language teaching throughout the world. Among the features of this approach were developing the ability to communicate in four language skills, mastering linguistic aspects, and using syllabus with varied approaches such as functional, situational, skill-based and structural, integrated learning, and communicative-based assessment. The textbook contents produced in this period were theme-based, while the teaching approach used task-based.

Although the 1994 ELT curriculum adopted communicative approach, the teaching process encountered several important obstacles and issues. First, teacher still emphasized on reading comprehension rather than combining four language skills. Second, the national examination still used the same test format as in the 1984 ELT curriculum that assessed only reading comprehension and language structure in form of multiple choices and denied the assessment of all aspects of communication competence. Therefore, the 1994 ELT curriculum also failed to meet expectations on students’ communication skills development (Jazadi, 2004; Alwasilah, 1997; Jazadi, 2000). Priyono (2004) confirmed that the failure of the 1994 ELT curriculum was due to the fact that students were unable to communicate and to understand English textbooks.

As a reflection of the previous curriculum, in 2004, the government again issued a policy of curriculum change as an effort to improve the 1994 ELT curriculum. According to Nur and Madkur (2014, p. 123), curriculum innovation is inevitable as global changes of science and technological developments are growing fast. Therefore, in response to the global trends of science and technology, in 1999, the government issued a regulation on regional autonomy. In connection with the issuance of the regulation, in 2004, the government through the education ministry again released a newly revised curriculum. By the time the curriculum was released to the public, various names were embedded in the 2004 curriculum; some call the “life skill curriculum”, some also associate it with a “genre-based approach”. However, the most popular name was “a competency-based curriculum” (Mustafa & Hamied, 2014, pp. 5-6). Sahiruddin (2013, p. 570) described that the 2004 ELT curriculum has a systematic orientation toward the achievement of students’ communicative competence in all levels of education in Indonesia. In addition, Nur and Madkur (2014, p. 123) suggested that the 2004 ELT curriculum adopted a representation scheme of communicative competence developed by Celce-Mucia et al. With communicative orientation, the trend of English learning process in schools emphasized more on a learner-centered approach. On national final exams, the government has integrated listening, reading, and grammar into the English test. The assessment of speaking and writing was conducted separately by teachers at school (Sahiruddin, 2013, p. 570).

As the Indonesian government has implemented a centralized curriculum policy, teachers were not given opportunity to develop the curriculum, and this became the trigger for criticism of the implementation of Competency Based Curriculum in 2004 (Nur & Madkur, 2014, Sahiruddin, 2013). Consequently, the government again issued a policy to improve the previous curriculum by accommodating the teachers and schools’ recommendation. The curriculum in 2006 was later known as the School Based Curriculum. Cahyono and Widiati (2011) argued that the 2006 curriculum was developed in response to changes occurring in the global and local context, students’ needs, Indonesian diversity, technological advances, science, and arts, as well as a balance between national needs and local needs.

Although 2006 curriculum offered a lot of flexibility, problems were still arose: First, the number learning subject is too much, while many competencies overlap one over another. These overlapping competencies denied students cognitive development. Second, the curriculum was not entirely competency-based. Third, competence does not holistically reflect the domain of knowledge, affective and skills. Fourth, some competencies were not accommodated such as character development and active learning. Fifth, the standard of learning was still teacher-oriented. Sixth, assessment standards still ignored aspects of process and
product (Sahiruddin, 2013, p. 570). In relation to that, Nur and Madkur (2014, p. 125-126) addressed some of the following specific issues on the implementation of the 2006 ELT curriculum: First, students learn pronunciation, word stressing, and intonation. However, the above elements were ignored in the test. Coherence between language skills and language components was not found. Similarly, listening, speaking, reading and writing activities were not integrated. Second, students learn more expressions compared to communication activities. Third, students focused on grammar and vocabulary, not on text. Fourth, students learn a lot of artificial text from textbooks, not from real texts. Fifth, reading and writing were prioritized, not the language use. Sixth, the learning process was more on textbook based so that students did not get the maximum learning opportunities in real communication that were integrated into listening, speaking, reading and writing activities. Seventh, the learning process was still teacher-centered. Since the 2006 ELT curriculum was considered fail to improve students’ English skills, some innovations have emerged in the 2013 curriculum policy.

2.2 ELT in the 2013 Curriculum

As has been indicated earlier that the common problems of the implementation of 2006 ELT curriculum were teachers’ focus more on developing students’ linguistics competence and discourse competence, yet ignored other competencies students should develop (Intansari, 2013, p. 244). Grammar and language forms were given a lot of portion in the teaching before students start producing text. According to Putra (2014, p. 68), this misinterpretation of the curriculum became more obvious as the test designed by teachers and ministry of education were mainly about reading comprehension and grammar while speaking and listening skills were ignored. Therefore, the emergence of 2013 ELT curriculum in Indonesia is a response to the reality that English learning in the previous curriculum failed to reach communicative goals set by the government (Tantra, 2015; Ahmad, 2014; Nur & Madkur, 2014; Wachidah, 2013). It is also a reaction to the fact that Indonesia is facing future world challenges toward the quality of education where PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) have reported that Indonesian students are lack of analytical, critical, and procedural competencies (Nur & Madkur, 2014, p. 124).

On the enactment of the 2013 curriculum as an extension to the previous curriculum, the English lesson also undergoes some adjustments to improve the weaknesses in the implementation of the former ELT curriculum (Ahmad, 2014). Nur and Madkur (2014, p. 126) identify some strengths of the current curriculum as it is developed by following these principles: First, 2013 ELT curriculum restores the essence of English language learning, that is, meaningfulness and communication functions. The ultimate goal of learning English is the development of students’ English communication skills. The 2013 ELT curriculum adopts the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. Second, the implementation of the 2013 ELT curriculum is expected to shift from very teacher-centered to student-centered. Third, students learn the language and its social functions, text structure, and grammar. The topic presented in textbook relates to life in school, home, and community. Fourth, students learn English by observation, inquiring, exploration, association, and communication. The above process is expected to encourage students to have critical, analytical, inquisitive, procedural, and communicative skills. Five, Teacher serves as a model of language user and language learner. Six, students use teaching materials from various sources that are authentic or close to authentic, including textbooks. Seven, students are empowered to obtain authentic texts. Eight, students are expected to learn English for interpersonal, transactional, and functional communication. Nine, students learn attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Ten, students learn English with activity based, real text, and use language in real communication.

2.3 The Principles and Characteristics of 2013 Curriculum

As stated in the regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture number 22 year 2016 on the standards of primary and secondary education process that the principles of the 2013 curriculum seeks to build the paradigm of learning which moves from students to know to be students to find out, from teacher-centered to learner-centered, from content-based to competency-based learning, from partial learning to integrated learning, learning takes place at home at school, and in the community, utilization of information and communication technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness of learning, and recognition of individual differences and students’ cultural background.
In terms of characteristics, the 2013 curriculum offers learning objectives that should cover the sphere of attitude, knowledge, and skills. As stated in the regulation that the elaboration of the three domains refers to the taxonomy of educational objectives where the aspect of attitude is obtained through “receiving, responding, appreciating, characterizing, and practicing”, the aspect of knowledge is gained through activities of “remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating”, and the aspect of skills are obtained through “observing, questioning, exploring, reasoning, presenting, and creating”.

3 METHODOLOGY

Since the purpose of this research is to explore the four senior high school English teachers’ perspectives of principles and characteristics of 2013 curriculum and how they practice those principles in ELT classroom, this research applied a qualitative study. Narrative reports were constructed for each teacher using semi structured interview to ensure that the data reflect a full picture of the condition. Four Indonesian senior high school teachers of English took part in this qualitative study. The reason was taken into consideration when these teachers were selected was that they have followed the 2013 ELT curriculum training, teaching the same school level, and using the same 2013 ELT textbook. The four teachers (named T1 to T4 in this study) teach English at senior high school in Palu, the capital of Sulawesi Tengah Province, and Luwuk, the capital of Banggai District in Sulawesi Tengah Province, Indonesia.

The research questions addressed in this study are:
1. What perspectives about 2013 curriculum do the teachers have?
2. To what extent do they implement the principles and the characteristics of 2013 curriculum in ELT classroom?

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

As the newly revised curriculum offered new changes, teachers as key curriculum implementers are required to have good understandings to shape their practice toward the existing innovations. The newly revised curriculum often results in discrepancy due to the process of receiving and perceiving (Bekalo and Welford, 2000), and contains complexities, challenges, and potential incongruent relationship with its practices (O’Sullivan, 2002).

In this section, we elaborate teacher’s perspectives about the principles and characteristics of the 2013 curriculum that include the approaches and models of learning offered in the curriculum. Then, we analyze how the principles and characteristics of the 2013 curriculum are translated into classroom learning. The discussions are presented qualitatively in the form of descriptive narratives.

The interview participants acknowledged that in general, many of the principles offered in the 2013 curriculum are similar to those in the previous curriculum, such as student-centered learning, competency-based learning, and the integration of information and communication technology in a learning process. T1 states that the similarity means that the principles are given a strong emphasis on teaching in the context of 2013 curriculum. However, according to T2 that she feels challenged by the emphasis on the principles where learning should take place not only at school but also at home and in the community and recognizing individual differences in terms of learning ability and learning preferences as well as students’ cultural background.

There is a new learning approach that becomes a special feature of the 2013 curriculum which well known as a scientific approach. Procedures in the approach include five steps: observing, questioning, experimenting, associating, and communicating. According to T3 and T4 that all steps in the scientific approach are still very difficult to implement in teaching English as they have not received a special technical guidance on the implementation. The examples of instructional videos that are often featured in the 2013 curriculum training do not yet represent the use of the approach in teaching English. The process of learning shown in the videos does not represent the competence of English teachers and the ability of high school students throughout Indonesia. The videos were taken in one of the schools in Bali province where Bali is known as the world’s tourist destination. This context, accordingly, makes the process of English learning easy.

T3 believes that the essence of learning is enjoyable. If students enjoy learning it will be easy for them to learn. On the basis of that view, he acknowledged that he does not fully use the procedures offered in the 2013 curriculum. The use of a scientific approach is time-consuming while learning competencies to be achieved are not based on the availability of time. In the 2013 curriculum,
English teaching is reduced from 4x50 minutes to 2x50 minutes per meeting in a week. Therefore, using a scientific approach to achieving learning indicators for four language skills with the very limited time is impossible. In addition to that, the absence of an English program such as English session outside of normal school hours makes teachers difficult to reach the competencies proposed by the 2013 curriculum.

Models of learning offered in the 2013 curriculum, such as Problem-Based Learning, Project-Based Learning, and Discovery Learning, also have the same essence with the scientific approach that encourages students to be more critical, independent, and creative in learning. Among the English teachers that we interviewed state that model they often use in improving the students’ four language skills is Project-Based learning. In learning language components, like pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, the teachers use Problem-Based Learning and Discovery Learning. T2 said that the most appropriate model for language learning is Project-Based Learning. Students feel happy when they are involved in communication tasks such as role play and conversation. However, T1 complains that although the use of Project-Based learning models is enjoyable, teachers of English are still challenged by time constraints. Using Problem-Based Learning model to achieve learning indicators take a lot of time because teachers should pay attention to each individual students’ indicators of achievement. Therefore, T1 and T2 admit that they are not fully using the procedures in the 2013 curriculum in an effort to achieve learning indicators. They prefer to use fun and effective learning models in achieving learning indicators.

In the 2013 curriculum, learning objectives should include the development of attitudes, knowledge, and skills, and are equally emphasized in a learning process. These three realms can be fully found in the taxonomy of learning objectives used in the 2013 curriculum. As stated in the regulation that the elaboration of the three domains refers to the taxonomy of educational objectives where the aspect of attitude is gained through “receiving, responding, appreciating, characterizing, and practicing”, the aspect of knowledge is gained through activities of “remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating”, and the aspect of skills are gained through “observing, questioning, exploring, reasoning, presenting, and creating”. T1 and T2 revealed that learning process proposed by 2013 curriculum by putting emphasis on the development of students’ attitude, knowledge, and skills is feasible. However, they are challenged by fact that they are difficult to develop teaching strategies to enhance higher-order thinking skills of their students and to change students learning habit from just memorizing facts to using complex ways to think about what they are learning. T1 and T2 admitted that their students are generally not used to follow a lesson by asking, analyzing, conveying reason, and creating ideas.

The four teachers admit that they find difficult to develop the structure of attitude when making learning indicators. As for long time the determination of objectives and indicators of learning is more dominated by aspects of knowledge and a few aspects of skills. Consequently, teachers are very difficult to assess each students’ attitude in detail as they are challenged by time constraints and a large number of students in the classroom. In the end, the teachers can only assess the most prominent attitude of the students. In addition to that, the learning evaluation system is still dominated by aspects of knowledge, and tend to ignore the evaluation of attitude competence and skills of students. For example, in English subject, the exam is dominated by understanding text, vocabulary, and grammar. Productive skills like writing and speaking are hardly tested.

5 CONCLUSION

This study concludes several points in relation to the English teachers’ perspectives and practices of principles and characteristics of 2013 curriculum in the context of English Language Teaching. First, teachers acknowledge that there are some similarities between the previous curriculum and the 2013 curriculum, and the similarities indicate a deeper emphasis on learning in the 2013 curriculum. Despite the similarity, teachers feel challenged by the new paradigm offered by the 2013 curriculum, such as learning should take place not only at school but also at home and in the community and recognizing individual differences in terms of learning ability and learning preferences as well as students’ cultural background. Second, teachers still find it difficult to use the scientific approach to learning English. Teachers have not received any specific guidelines for English learning using that approach. Third, the reduction of English teaching time from 4x50 minutes to 2x50 minutes makes a lot of burden in achieving learning indicators with the number of students in the classroom between 35 to 40 students. Thus, teachers tend to use only classical
methods that students’ enjoy. Fourth, in the previous curriculum, teaching and assessment often ignore attitude aspect. Therefore, English teachers find it difficult to develop the structure of attitude when making learning objectives in the 2013 curriculum. In the assessment, teachers find it difficult because they have to assess the attitude of each student in data. In the end, the teachers can only assess the most prominent attitude of the students.

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